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What concerns Belarusians? The study of issues and fears in Belarusian regions

Anton Radniankou



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Almost a year since its beginning, the political crisis in Belarus is escalating problems that people in this country had been facing before it started. The Belarusian society is in depression. The challenges it is experiencing look unsurmountable and intertwined in a snarl knot. In an attempt to unravel it, this paper focuses on main issues that concern the Belarusian people and major differences between e.g. Minsk and the regions, as well as groups of population.

The **economic depression and degradation of social services** is of no less concern for Belarusians than the **political crisis**; yet, this paper starts with looking into the political issues. Many perceive them as the core of the 'knot', from which other challenges are stemming. In addition to the abovementioned three groups, we will also describe the **environmental challenges**. Paled into insignificance, they can yet make it to the top of priorities.

The basis of the research

In this paper, the author relies on several methods: monitoring regional media, two focus groups with experts, and a Viber survey in cooperation with the National Poll (Narodny Opros). Conducted in late June 2021, it covered the active segment of the protest audience. Their opinion is obviously more politicized; yet, it enables good understanding of differences across regions. After the data cleaning, 5,685 questionnaires were analyzed. The study also used findings of Chatham House and other think tanks studying public opinion in Belarus.

The author also appreciates valuable comments from two peer reviewers.

General regional trends: cities on the rise, while villages are declining

Before proceeding to public issues, it is important to understand where Belarusians live. Belarus is highly urbanised, with 7.3 million people living in towns and cities, and only 2.1 million in rural area (comparable to the population of Minsk).

Relatively successful vs. obviously depressive regions

Dynamics differ per regions. The capital city is the only place in Belarus enjoying sustainable growth over the recent 20 years. Demographically, the regions that have lost the smallest shares of populations over the last 20 years can be considered relatively successful.¹ These are Brest and Homiel regions (Palesie, or Southern Belarus), and the region of Minsk. The loss of population in these areas ranged between 4 and 10% during this period.

The group of the most demographically depressive regions includes the regions of Hrodna, Viciebsk and Mahiliou; they have lost between 13 and 17% of their populations over the two decades. These regions are also significantly smaller than those in the 'successful' group, with 1-1.1 vs. 1.3-1.4 million population per region.

Cities growing and villages declining

Taken aside, cities demonstrate dynamics that are more mixed. In regional centers, cities and big towns (population over 100,000), the situation is mostly sustainable and positive. Brest and Hrodna have demonstrated the most rapid growth over the last 20 years (+18%). Well below this growth rate, Viciebsk, Homiel and Mahiliou have nevertheless all managed to see some population growth.

(Table 1)

Table 1

	Population by the beginning of 2001	Population by the beginning of 2021	Growth 2001-2021
Brest	288 821	340 318	18%
Hrodna	303 917	357 510	18%
Viciebsk	347 828	362 949	4%
Homiel	487 235	507 795	4%
Mahiliou	356 814	357 404	0%

*Belstat data

The situation of rural areas is similar in most regions. They have shrunk by third over the last 20 years.

The risks are the worst where economic challenges accompany the increasing demographic problems. They give rise to depressive regions with chronically dwindling populations, such as regions of Viciebsk or Mahiliou.

Four main public issues aggravated by the political crisis

Issue 1 The political crisis: repressions, anxiety, and mistrust

Perceptions of main issues differ between Minsk and the regions. In regions, people are mostly concerned about high prices and finding a job, roads and quality of healthcare. Massive protests (and the subsequent repressions) occurred not everywhere, nor did they last long. For many, the protest was about the information noise on Telegram channels. Still, surveys and focus groups with experts alike put the political issues first, since they are perceived as the core of all other problems.

Political repressions keep the society on the edge

As the repressions of Lukashenka's regime against the Belarusian people have made the fear ubiquitous, Belarusians do not feel safe in their own country. Even supporters of Lukashenka's regime share some of this anxiety.²

The political questions are in the top list of issues as seen by the protest-minded audiences in Minsk and the regions.

(Table 2)

As the scale of crackdown in Minsk is overwhelming, it is much lower in regions. Beyond the capital, Homiel and Hrodna regions display the strongest perception of repressions. However, the clampdown on regional media and activists in July 2021 has a chance of closing this gap in perceptions between Minsk and the rest of Belarus, should it continue indefinitely.

(Tables 3,4)

Participants of focus groups noted that, as the repressions hit the businesses that supported the protesters and joined the strike in October 2020, many of them closed down operations. For years, many of them had been cooperating with urban groups, providing their premises for events, and supporting non-profit projects.

Three main issues for protest-minded audience

Table 2

	Regions	Minsk
Political repressions	49%	83%
Trust in police	32%	52%
Trust in local authorities	32%	33%

*Survey of the National Poll audience, June 2021

How strong is the persecution of expressing political views different from those promoted by the government?

Table 3

	Very strong	Strong	Somewhat, not very strong
Capital	92%	7%	0.4%
Regional centers	76%	20%	2%
Rayon centers	57%	30%	8%
Towns and urban settlements	60%	29%	7%
Agro-towns and villages	66%	17%	9%

*Survey of the National Poll audience, June 2021. The rest of respondents chose other options

How strong is the persecution of expressing political views different from those promoted by the government?

Table 4

	Very strong	Strong	Somewhat, not very strong
Minsk	92%	7%	0.4%
Homiel Region	69%	23%	4%
Hrodna Region	69%	21%	7%
Brest Region	65%	28%	3%
Mahiliou Region	65%	26%	6%
Minsk Region	64%	24%	8%
Viciebsk Region	60%	29%	6%

*Survey of the National Poll audience, June 2021. The rest of respondents chose other options

The authorities sparked mistrust

By and large, Belarusians mistrust the state institutions.³ Focus groups revealed that the local authorities had grown more passive and hesitant to reach out to the public, independent initiatives and activists. Local elites are increasingly splitting to 'civilians' and security apparatus (siloviki). As local executive chiefs are losing their power over the security officials, these two groups start to live and act apart.

Local public and activists has become less willing to cooperate with the local authorities since summer and autumn 2020. While joint projects are scaled down, local dialogue attempts have failed completely. Few civil initiatives continue cooperation with the authorities.

(Table 5)

In general, do common people in your community trust or mistrust local authorities?

Table 5

	Definitely mistrust	Rather mistrust	Sometimes yes, sometimes no
Capital	68%	28%	2%
Regional centers	55%	38%	5%
Rayon centers	43%	43%	9%
Towns and urban settlements	48%	40%	9%
Agro-towns and villages	44%	40%	13%

* Survey of the National Poll audience, June 2021. The rest of respondents chose other options

As a trend, the lack of trust in government generates risks of the erosion of the state. It is very visible in the perception of corruption. While the majority, or 72% of the interviewees, believe that the local authorities are rather susceptible to corruption, only 30% indicate that business is corrupted. Other public institutions are losing trust, too: 29% see corruption in housing and utilities sector, 27% in healthcare, 24% in education, and 21% in roads and road facilities.

(Table 6)

Crackdown reached the regional media

Regional media give much attention to topics of repressions, coronavirus, and shape of

While journalists and newsrooms were under attack since August 2020, when websites of independent media were blocked and journalists detained for covering protests, it was in summer 2021 when regional media found themselves under targeted pressure. Majority of independent regional media were raided. Many media and individual journalists were fined and arrested; some of them had to stop operations and leave the country.

The closure of regional media can leave populations in regions uncovered by the pro-democratic informational agenda. While state regional media are marginalized, independent media might lose some segments of these audiences. In regions,

What do you think about the level of corruption in your community?

Table 6

	Very high	Rather high	Medium
Capital	41%	29%	11%
Regional centers	27%	29%	16%
Rayon centers	25%	27%	17%
Towns and urban settlements	21%	29%	14%
Agro-towns and villages	14%	22%	17%

* Survey of the National Poll audience, June 2021. The rest of respondents chose other options

media consumption is characterized by domination of television and social media such as V Kontakte and Odnoklassniki, in contrast to independent media that are increasingly switching to Minsk-centered Telegram.⁴

Therefore:

The political crisis and large-scale political repressions against dissenting voices have caused serious anxiety in the society, including even the regime supporters. Belarusians do not trust the authorities or state institutions. There are almost no institutions left that Belarusians would be predominantly positive about. People in Belarus believe that state institutions are corrupted. The closure of regional independent media can leave people in regions uncovered by pro-democratic agenda.

Issue 2 Economic depression: shortage of jobs, high prices, and migration

The fact that the Belarusian economy has been in stagnation for more than 10 years produces depressive expectations. The positive image of development of Belarus is gone. Run by IPM think tank, monthly surveys of businesses reveal expectations towards further downturn of business activities.⁵

Government's attempts to revitalize the regional economy produce no significant results. Running 'A Year of Home Town' once in three years is not

enough for generating new dynamics. Authorities 'doing their best' were not good enough to transform Orša Rayon alone into an 'advanced development zone'.⁶

Local budgets are increasingly relying on subsidies. Regions of Mahiliou and Viciebsk get the most support per capita; only the budget of Minsk City remains subsidy-free and contributes positively to the national budget.⁷

In people's perceptions, disparities between the capital city and the regions are most evident in prices, labor market, and migration. While for people in regions these issues are among the most important, except the political ones, the strong economy of Minsk is more successful in adapting to crises.

(Table 7)

The public sector degrades and creates no jobs in regions

Largely owing to the degradation of state enterprises, the economic depression makes the workers fearful of lay-offs and salary cuts. Fears are particularly common in towns relying on just a few companies for living, whereas a company crisis brings about a community crisis.

Seeing or not seeing employment as an issue is the difference between the regions and Minsk. With its big and diverse economy, and a large share of private business, the capital faces less problems in finding a job.

(Table 8)

What issues of your community concern you most of all in recent time?

Table 7

	Regions	Minsk
Food prices	29%	25%
Employment	20%	4%
Many people leaving	11%	20%

*Survey of the National Poll audience, June 2021

*Is it easy or difficult to find a good job in your community?**Table 8*

	Definitely difficult	Rather difficult	Neither easy nor difficult
Capital	26%	37%	28%
Regional centers	63%	30%	5%
Rayon centers	76%	20%	3%
Towns and urban settlements	67%	25%	6%
Agro-towns and villages	63%	24%	8%

* Survey of the National Poll audience, June 2021. The rest of respondents chose other options

While the problem of finding a job in regions is relevant for 20% interviewees, it can exacerbate in the future. The closure of borders, ongoing growth of prices, and the risk of economic crisis will make this issue more important for people in regions.

Conscious of growing prices, Belarusians are afraid of upcoming crisis

Many Belarusians speak about the growth of prices, which is largely associated with the expectation of an upcoming economic crisis. After the political issues, this issue is placed first in our survey. Notably, regions and Minsk are not so different.

(Table 9)

The perception of the prices of communal utilities is not so dramatic; again, no major differences are registered between regions and the capital. Partially, it is because the government subsidizes the utilities. (Table 10)

Preparing to leave the country, Minsk first out

Emigration moods are strong, as the public is fearful that the political crisis and economic depression would force out the most skilful ones, such as physicians, IT workers, entrepreneurs, etc.⁸ Yet, lower skilled workers are up to leaving, too. A growing number of people think about helping their children to leave rather than just finding a temporary work abroad.

*In general, do you think that food prices in your community are high or low?**Table 9*

	Definitely high	Rather high	Medium
Capital	53%	37%	8%
Regional centers	61%	31%	6%
Rayon centers	53%	35%	9%
Towns and urban settlements	57%	34%	8%
Agro-towns and villages	50%	35%	12%

* Survey of the National Poll audience, June 2021. The rest of respondents chose other options

In general, do you think prices of communal utilities in your community are high or low?

Table 10

	Definitely high	Rather high	Medium
Capital	30%	35%	28%
Regional centers	39%	34%	24%
Rayon centers	30%	38%	26%
Towns and urban settlements	36%	37%	23%
Agro-towns and villages	27%	34%	30%

* Survey of the National Poll audience, June 2021. The rest of respondents chose other options

While the political emigration is on the rise, the next months can also be marked by growing economic emigration, if the economic situation deteriorates.

The feeling of growing emigration is stronger in the pro-protest group in Minsk, something that might be attributed to their exposure to repressions or to higher labor mobility of people in the capital.

(Table 11)

Therefore:

People in regions are particularly sensitive to the threat of job cuts and reduction of salaries, as the prices are going up. The emigration has increased in the groups of both high-skilled and lower-skilled workers. Belarusians are in for a bad economic crisis. Fearful of closing big and small businesses, they are considering leaving the country.

In recent 12 months, have people started to leave your community more or less often to find a job?

Table 11

	Definitely more often	Rather more often	It's the same
Capital	54%	31%	3%
Regional centers	40%	37%	8%
Rayon centers	45%	33%	6%
Towns and urban settlements	38%	33%	11%
Agro-towns and villages	38%	33%	11%

* Survey of the National Poll audience, June 2021. The rest of respondents chose other options

Issue 3

Degradation of social services: Belarus decreasingly resembles a welfare state

The economic stagnation reduces spending on social services. While Minsk still can afford adequate spending, this issue is particularly acute for the regions.

(Table 12)

Infrastructure in regions poorly developed, crisis killing hopes for improvement

Participants of focus groups with experts shared their feeling of decreasing spending on social infrastructure. The quality of new infrastructure is poor, as local authorities are trying to save funds. Small towns experience the most infrastructure-related problems. Brest stands out as a positive example, where urban infrastructure continues to develop.

At the same time, road infrastructure and public transportation system in Minsk remain acceptable. Major funds are invested in construction of metro and road network. Roads are a big problem in regions, and the public transport is degrading.

(Table 13)

Minsk is also facing cuts of spending on public infrastructure and traffic network; however, the impact will only be noticeable in a few years. In addition, the capital city is self-sufficient with its large subsidy-free budget comparable to a fifth of the national budget, and the lowest debt load among all regions.⁹

Notably, authorities tried to finance large regional projects via accessible loans from international finance institutions. As these institutions are suspending new projects in Belarus, the government is facing difficulties funding construction of new highways and bridges, insulation of buildings etc.

What issues of your community concern you most of all in recent time?

Table 12

	Regions	Minsk
Condition and availability of roads	24%	5%
Quality of healthcare	21%	11%
Quality of education	7%	8%

* Survey of the National Poll audience, June 2021

In general, what is your assessment of the condition of roads in your community?

Table 13

	Definitely bad	Rather bad	Normal
Capital	13%	32%	42%
Regional centers	24%	37%	34%
Rayon centers	40%	36%	21%
Towns and urban settlements	46%	30%	20%
Agro-towns and villages	36%	30%	26%

* Survey of the National Poll audience, June 2021. The rest of respondents chose other options

The quality of social services worsening, as staff shortage starts to be felt

Many link the crisis to the deteriorating social services. According to Chatham House, should Lukashenka stay in power, 37% of respondents believe the healthcare system would deteriorate, and 35% expect the education system to perform worse.¹⁰ The participants of expert focus groups shared an opinion that the housing and municipal services are doing worse job. It can be related to the budget cuts, making their work increasingly about imitating order.

Regions are experiencing shortage of teachers and health workers. Medical institutions are dealing with the issue of outdated equipment. The smaller the town, the worse these problems are. Less active groups perceive social issues as a matter of course; e.g., pensioners might be unhappy with the quality of healthcare, yet they do not think it can be better.

Monitoring regional media finds that Covid-19 pandemic remains in the top of topics, and the majority of Belarusians do not think that Belarus handles the pandemic well.¹¹ Nevertheless, the significance of the pandemic in the public discourse is decreasing, something attributable to the public fatigue with the topic and the availability of vaccine. However, the pandemic's 'side effects' stay there, such as barriers for leaving Belarus in a search of a job.

Belarusians are also concerned about the education, which is free of charge only on paper. Exactions in schools for renovations and other needs increasingly turn into a burden for parents, against the background of stagnating wages and growing prices. On the other hand, the quality of university education and high fees for studies result in 'brain drain' of young Belarusians. Notably, the public feels the downfall in quality of the Belarusian education.

Therefore:

Belarusians are worried about poor public infrastructure and cuts in spending on improving it. Economizing on healthcare, education etc., shortage of personnel in social sector, poor higher education for high payment in fee-based studies, and deterioration of housing and municipal services,

all indicate that the welfare state is fading down to mere declamations in speeches of Lukashenka's officials.

Issue 4 Environment: polluting industries against people's will

Compared to other issues faced by Belarus, the environment is put on a back burner. In our study of the National Poll's audience, only 5% indicated that environment was an important issue in their community. Typical for Minsk and regional centers, the most popular issues, e.g. industry and car pollution, are in fact a dark side of life in large cities.

However, it is possible to identify three main environmental matters of concern for the protest-minded audience

1. Industry pollution – 58%
2. Car pollution – 56%
3. Cutting of trees – 47%

*Survey of the National Poll audience, June 2021

Industries pollute, while activists protest

The issues of environment are important primarily for people in cities with polluting factories. Notably, if a company is economically successful, the air pollution is rather seen as a payment for success; however, people are much more negative about polluting and economically unsustainable industries.

Construction of new dirty plants sparkle many public conflicts in regions, such as cellulose factory in Svietlahorsk, Omsk Carbon manufacturing in Mahiliou, and battery factory in Brest. Despite efforts of activists, all companies were launched.

Once a hallmark of Minsk, traffic jams are now present in capitals of many regions and rayons. This is caused by consistent motorization and outdated traffic infrastructure planning, as the road marking and traffic signalization remain ineffective, and traffic safety is low.

As opposed to Western states, the climate change

and other environmental issues are not on political agenda of the Belarusian society. The functioning of the Belarusian Nuclear Power Plant is probably the only topic in common. Wary of possible incidents, Belarusians have no confidence in state institutions in charge of it.

Therefore:

Polluting industries are launched in Belarus despite dissatisfaction of common people and activists. The functioning of the Belarusian Nuclear Power Plant also causes serious public concerns. The growth of traffic jams in Minsk and regional cities creates discomfort.

Conclusion: Belarusians likely to grow more discontented with life in Belarus

For quite a while, the development of regions has been a headache for both the government and the regional populations. This study, though, is special for being conducted amidst the worst political crisis in the country's history, as the political issues are coupled with economy, demography and other domains.

As a result, the respondents are negative about almost all topics. Focus groups with experts and surveys of pro-protest audiences alike are marked with depression.

It was not that the regions had few problems prior to the 2020 political crisis. Ever since the economic downturn in 2015 and 2016, the regional development challenges were on the rise. It was mostly thanks to the private sector that the economic recovery centered around Minsk and its region, unlike before. At the same time, it widened a development gap between the capital and the rest of the country, while the demographic decline made the situation worse.

The political crisis stepped in to reinforce the economic challenges and render the process self-maintaining.

While regions had been facing problems of employment, high prices and migration for quite a while, the economic stagnation can make small and mid-size towns share the fate of rural areas.

Never have Belarusians indulged in big illusions about local authorities. Yet, the present moment is characterized by a total loss of trust in state institutions for a considerable part of the society. This can have long-term negative impact, such as the risk of erosion of the state system and, consequently, a growing gap between the society and the ruling class.

The poor economy and inefficient state institutions will inevitably make the situation worse in the social sector. Already suffering because of outdated infrastructure, regions will see even less innovation. As the funds and skilled labor are scarce, the quality of social services will drop.

These changes will occur neither overnight nor everywhere. Yet, coming as a stress for the entire governance, they will also cause public tension. Belarusians will be increasingly dissatisfied and angry about life in Belarus.

The author:

Antin Radnianskou is a Director at the Center for New Ideas. With education in intercultural communications and financial markets analysis, he has previously managed sustainable development projects in regions and run a high-tech team at Minsk Watch Factory.

Email: radnianskou@newbelarus.vision.

Center for New Ideas:

The Center for New Ideas is an independent think tank focusing on development opportunities and addressing challenges that Belarus faces in the 21st century. Our mission is to help the society and the state to build a more open, thriving and sustainable Belarus.

www.newBelarus.vision

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The audience of the poll

Annex 1

Sample by the size of the community/settlement, National Poll, June 2021



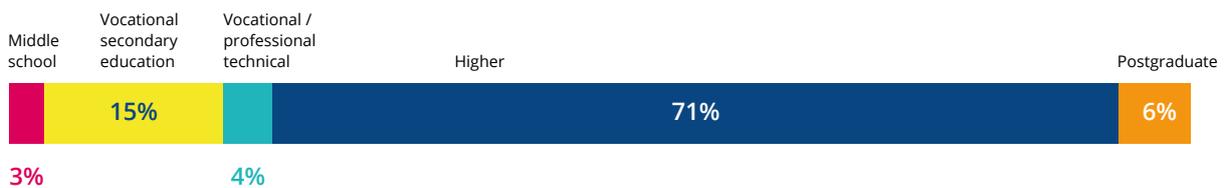
Sample by region, National Poll, June 2021



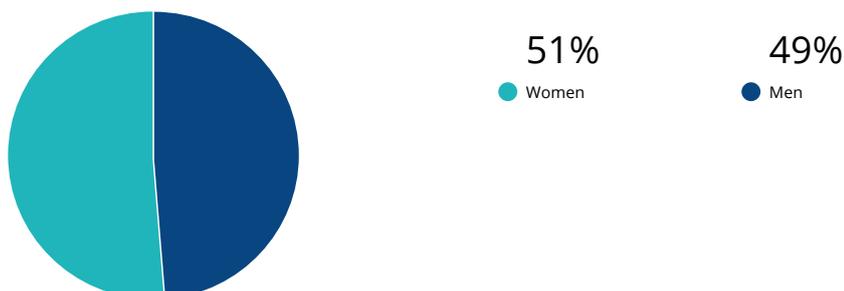
Sample by age, National Poll, June 2021



Sample by education, National Poll, June 2021



Sample by gender, National Poll, June 2021



The questionnaire for the survey of the national poll audience

Annex 2

General situation assessment

1. In general, are you satisfied or unsatisfied with situation in your community/location?

Definitely satisfied

Rather satisfied

Somewhat yes, and somewhat no

Rather unsatisfied

Definitely unsatisfied

Hard to answer

**2. What issues of your community concern you most of all in recent time?
(please choose not more than three)**

Food prices

Prices of other goods and services

Prices of communal utilities

Employment

Many people leaving

Quality of education

Quality of healthcare

Public transportation services

Condition and availability of roads

Condition and availability of parks

Condition and availability of cultural sites

Condition and availability of sport sites

Environment situation

Corruption

Participation of common citizens in work of local authorities

Trust in local authorities

Political repressions

Criminality

Trust in police

I am only concerned with issues of national scale

Other (please add your answer)

Hard to say

Prices of food, other goods and services, and communal utilities

3. In general, do you think that food prices in your community are high or low?

Definitely low
Rather low
Medium
Rather high
Definitely high
Hard to say

4. In general, do you think that prices of other goods and services in your community are high or low?

Definitely low
Rather low
Medium
Rather high
Definitely high
Hard to say

5. In general, do you think that rates of communal services in your community are high or low?

Definitely low
Rather low
Medium
Rather high
Definitely high
Hard to say

Employment and labor migration

6. What do you think, is it easy or difficult to find a good job in your community?

Definitely easy
Rather easy
Neither easy nor difficult
Rather difficult
Definitely difficult
Hard to say

7. In your opinion, has it become easier or more difficult to find a good job in your community in recent 12 months?

Definitely easier
Rather easier
It's the same
Rather more difficult
Definitely more difficult
Hard to say

8. What do you think, have people started to leave your community more or less often to find a job in recent 12 months?

- Definitely less often
- Rather less often
- It's the same
- Rather more often
- Definitely more often
- Hard to say

Healthcare and education

9. In your opinion, is it easy or difficult to get good healthcare services in your community?

- Definitely easy
- Rather easy
- Neither easy nor difficult
- Rather difficult
- Definitely difficult
- Hard to say

10. What do you think, has it become easier or more difficult to get good healthcare services in your community in recent 12 months?

- Definitely easier
- Rather easier
- It's the same
- Rather more difficult
- Definitely more difficult
- Hard to say

11. In your view, is it possible or impossible to get good education in your community?

- Definitely possible
- Rather possible
- Not easy, but not impossible
- Rather impossible
- Definitely impossible
- Hard to say

Criminality and trust in police

12. In your opinion, what is the crime level in your community?

- Definitely low
- Rather low
- Medium
- Rather high

Definitely high

Hard to say

13. What do you think, do people in your community mostly trust or mistrust the police?

Definitely trust

Rather trust

Sometimes yes, sometimes no

Rather mistrust

Definitely mistrust

Hard to say

14. In your view, has the trust in police changed or not in your community in recent 12 months?

Definitely increased

Rather increased

It's the same

Rather decreased

Definitely decreased

Hard to say

Public transportation and roads

15. What is your assessment of public transportation services in your community?

Definitely good

Rather good

OK

Rather bad

Definitely bad

Hard to say

16. What is your assessment of the condition of roads in your community?

Definitely good

Rather good

OK

Rather bad

Definitely bad

Hard to say

Public spaces

17. What is your assessment of the situation of parks in your community?

Definitely good

Rather good

OK

Rather bad

Definitely bad

Hard to say

18. In general, what is your assessment of the situation of cultural sites, such as museums, galleries and arts centers, in your community?

Definitely good

Rather good

OK

Rather bad

Definitely bad

Hard to say

19. What is the situation of sport sites in your community, such as stadiums, swimming pools, and training grounds?

Definitely good

Rather good

OK

Rather bad

Definitely bad

Hard to say

Environment

20. Speaking in general about the environmental conditions in your community, what is your assessment?

Definitely good

Rather good

OK

Rather bad

Definitely bad

Hard to say

21. What environmental issues do you find important for your community? (feel free to pick several options)

Industry pollution

Radiation pollution

Cutting of trees

Car pollution

Dumps and litter

Wastewater and pollution of water bodies

Other (please add your answer)

Hard to say

Corruption

22. What do you think about the level of corruption in your community?

- Definitely low
- Rather low
- Medium
- Rather high
- Definitely high
- Hard to say

23. Which areas in your community do you think are the most corrupted? (feel free to pick several options)

- Education
- Healthcare
- Roads and road facilities
- Housing and communal services
- Local authorities in general
- Business
- Other (please add your answer)
- Hard to say

Interaction with local authorities and repressions + experiment on local elections

24. What do you think, can common people in your community influence decisions of local authorities (executive committees)?

- Definitely yes
- Rather yes
- Sometimes yes, sometimes no
- Rather no
- Definitely no
- Hard to say

25. In your opinion, do common people in your community generally trust or mistrust the local authorities?

- Definitely trust
- Rather trust
- Sometimes yes, sometimes no
- Rather mistrust
- Definitely mistrust
- Hard to say

26. In your view, has the level of trust in local authorities changed or not in your community in recent 12 months?

- Definitely increased
- Rather increased
- It's the same

Rather decreased
Definitely decreased
Hard to say

27. In your opinion, how strong is the persecution of expressing political views different from those promoted by the government?

No persecution
Not strong
Somewhat, not very strong
Strong
Very strong
Hard to say

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